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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000057

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS LEADER SHARES POLITICAL INSIGHTS, OFFERS
TO MEDIATE

REF: A. CONAKRY 0029

- [1](#)B. CONAKRY 0046
- [1](#)C. CONAKRY 0010
- [1](#)D. CONAKRY 0013

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Archbishop of Guinea,s Anglican Church shared a number of useful insights on Guinea,s political situation and the various actors with the Ambassador. A highly respected leader and one of the key players during the civil unrest in early 2007, Gomez said that if he is asked, he is willing to act as a mediator when various groups start getting together to discuss possible solutions to Guinea,s current political problems. Although he advocated strongly for national dialogue, Gomez said that Guinea,s legislative elections are the key to resolving the situation peacefully. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ambassador Carter met with Monsignor Gomez, the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Guinea, on January 17. Gomez is one of Guinea,s most respected religious leaders. He played a key mediating role during negotiations in early 2007 when Guinea struggled with civil unrest and political turmoil following a nationwide labor strike. Gomez also participated in recent negotiations with the unions that resulted in postponing a resumption of that same nationwide labor strike (reftel A). Poloff also participated in the meeting.

PROBLEMS IN BOTH CAMPS

[1](#)3. (C) Commenting on the political turmoil during the week of January 7 (reftels), Gomez said that problems exist within both political camps, i.e. that of President Lansana Conte and that of Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate. Acknowledging long standing complaints of poor governance under the president, Gomez said that the prime minister has also not delivered what the population is demanding. According to Gomez, the Committee de Suivi (reftel B) is a good mechanism for airing some of these problems and discussing possible solutions.

ELECTIONS ARE THE KEY

[1](#)4. (C) However, Gomez emphasized that the real answer to Guinea,s current political problems rests on successful, transparent legislative elections. He noted that to achieve the change people are hoping for, it will likely be necessary

to amend the constitution and legal code. &The current legislature is not independent,8 he said, making it unlikely that any proposed legal changes will get very far until a new legislature is in place. Gomez added that although the January 27 Accords technically give the PM authority over the government, Kouyate in fact does not hold the power.

15. (SBU) Later in the discussion, Gomez returned to elections, stressing that international pressure is critical. He said that although the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) is an important element for transparency, it simply isn't enough. &They lack the means,8 Gomez said. The Ambassador told Gomez that the U.S. Government is committed to encouraging free, fair and transparent elections as soon as possible, and has resources in place to assist with the electoral process, and especially the CENI.

WE NEED A NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

16. (SBU) In addition to the Committee de Suivi, Gomez said that it is critical that stakeholders organize a National Roundtable as soon as possible. He said that this should include the widest possible array of political actors in order to get everyone to the same table and get them talking about a common strategy for achieving common goals. Gomez said that &the Committee is just for reviewing the Accords, the Roundtable is to look at the big picture.8

RESPECT FOR THE CHIEF

17. (C) When the Ambassador asked Gomez about how the
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president fits into the picture and whether he would be willing to accept popular demands, Gomez said that &you have to realize that Conte comes from a military background, which governs how he does things.8 Gomez added that Conte has had the opportunity to single-handedly rule the country for 26 years, which gave him plenty of time to develop &bad habits.8 At the same time, Gomez said that when Conte accepted Kouyate as the PM, it was essentially breaking new ground, asserting that in the past, Conte would have never accepted a PM being foisted upon him. According to Gomez, the situation is complicated by Conte,s frail health, which makes him vulnerable to the manipulations of his entourage. Gomez said that Guinea,s Chief of Protocol, Idrissa Thiam, &is the most powerful chief of protocol in the world... where else does someone in charge of protocol have so much influence? - he knows exactly what to whisper and when.8 Again mentioning elections, Gomez said &if the elections are transparent, the president,s power will be divided.8

18. (C) Later in the discussion, Gomez again commented on the president in the context of discussing why the population has been willing to tolerate ineffective leadership for so long. Gomez said that there is a very important cultural aspect that must be taken into consideration. &In our culture,8 Gomez said, &we respect the chief, and even more so when he is sick. According to Gomez, people are generally sympathetic on the outside while secretly hoping that the end comes soon. &If Conte dies tomorrow, it will be a very different Guinea,8 Gomez said.

PM MADE BAD CHOICES) IS POLITICALLY CONSTRAINED

19. (C) Turning to the office of the prime minister, Gomez said that the reality of Kouyate,s technocratic government is that some of the ministers were not well chosen. Gomez clarified that Kouyate was under pressure to appoint an entire cabinet in a very short period of time and he was

hampered by his long absence of Guinea. According to Gomez, Kouyate appointed people that he knew as well as people that were recommended to him by others, ones that may not have been good choices. Gomez said that the dismissal of Communications Minister Justin Morel Jr (reftel C) further constrains Kouyate since he no longer has a mechanism for sharing his administration,s messages.

RELIGIOUS CREDIBILITY

¶10. (C) In response to a question about the general religious perspective on the political situation, Gomez said that for the most part, the Christian Council shares the same viewpoint. &However, it is more complicated with the imams,8 he said. Gomez said that in reality, the inter-religious council does not work very well. According to Gomez, some of the imams are not independent, which means they represent some external influences that are perpetuated by a long history of direct connections to the government. He added &the State wants to manage everybody, the unions, the Patronat, civil society...the Muslims are more numerous, but the Christians are more credible.8

¶11. (SBU) When asked whether he would be willing to take a leadership role within the context of the Committee de Suivi and/or a national roundtable, Gomez said that if asked, he would do it. &If it is to better the country, why would I refuse?8 he said.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Monsignor Gomez is likely to be an important player in Guinea,s political struggle, possibly as a mediator, but also as a voice of reason behind the scenes. He is well respected, which was evident just in the long walk from the Ambassador,s office to the main gate, which had every local staff member and Embassy guard bowing to him deferentially) impressive for a Christian leader in a predominantly Muslim society. Gomez has an interesting perspective on the various political actors and will likely continue to provide some useful insights. However, on the walk out, he was visibly worried. He told Poloff that even though Guineans are afraid of violence, especially because of the country,s troubled history, people are tired and the young people in particular, are impatient. &I don,t know how long they are willing to

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wait for change,8 he said. Gomez seems to fundamentally want to help Guinea resolve its political problems without violence) and he is one of the few out there that does not appear to be doing so for his own personal gain. END
COMMENT.

CARTER